1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

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other evil spirit or evil magic that may be directed against her. If she is a worshipper of the African deities of the *vodun* cult, she may also ask the *vodun* priest to determine by divination what spirit will protect the child, and what her own deity asks to insure his aid. During all her pregnancy she is particularly careful to avoid eating those foods which are "hateful" to her — that is, which cause her to become ill — though in Mirebalais, at least, it is not necessary that she refrain from partaking of the foods "hateful" to her husband. A pregnant woman has privileges and powers not shared with other women, as was evidenced when a Haitian man once appeared with his eye half shut, explaining that the sty was a punishment for his refusal to buy something his pregnant spouse had coveted. "They do not always know they are sending you a sty, but it is a power they have," he made clear.

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Shortly before parturition is expected, both the pregnant woman and her husband invoke the aid of the family deities and make them offerings of a *couvert sec*.* The rite is an informal one that need not necessarily take place in the familial house of worship; if it is more convenient, it may be performed inside their own house or in the courtyard. After reciting the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, a prayer such as the following is pronounced by the woman:

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> "*Toutes mystères, tant pour papa que manman, du même de côté mari moin: m'ap mandé ou pou' moin fait un heureuse accouchement, pou' l'ouv'i chemin ba moin.* — All the gods, both of my father and of my mother, as well as those of my husband: I ask that you cause me to have a good delivery, that you open the road for me."

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At the same time the family ancestors are not overlooked:

> "*Moin mandé nou' tous pou' nou' vini délivré moin, pou' nou' l'ouvri chemin pou' moin, pou' pa quitté*

* The various types of offerings will be discussed in the next section of this book.

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

584 587 836 truth, but the matter is recognized as one which concerns only her husband and herself, and if he is willing to keep her, it is his own affair. Consensus of opinion in Mirebalais is that the percentage of girls who do not have pre-marital sexual relations is relatively small, but the belief is expressed that chastity is more prevalent among country women than among those of the town, where, in turn, it is more frequent than in larger centers such as Port-au-Prince. Even though 836 848 pre-marital relations are commonplace, however, the pregnancy of an unmarried girl is regarded as both reprehensible and unfortunate, and she is severely beaten for it by her family. In such cases, if the father of the unborn child will take the girl, his parents are sent to bring her, but where the parents of the man refuse to ask for the girl because they do not approve of her, then, if he still desires her, he must himself face the anger of her parents. Should he not wish to come for her, she may either remain with her family or seek work in another community. In any event, her child will be well cared for by her family, and no reproach will attach to it because of the circumstances of its birth.

585 782 796 Before a mating of any type is consummated, the familial spirits must be notified of the approaching event so that they may be well disposed toward it, for no union where this is neglected can enjoy happiness or peace. One Mirebalais woman was pointed out as an object lesson of the necessity of doing this. Though a devotee of several gods, neither she nor her husband was willing to perform the necessary rites for her gods before their marriage. She was suffering from an [753] [828] acute case of melancholia after the birth of her first child, and the prevailing opinion was that she was going mad because of the neglect of her duty toward her deities. Shortly before a woman goes to her husband, therefore, a *couvert sec* for the Rada deities is given both by herself and by her betrothed. If the family of either the young man or the woman possess deities of the powerful Péro group, more inclusive offerings

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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cattle and all other animals when the river floods. Rituals involving these larger sacrifices, however, are held only on the rarest of occasions, and are thus much less common than the ceremony which, typical of those witnessed, may now be described.

This *service* was held in a habitation southwest of Mirebalais, across the Tombe River in the foothills of the mountains. It was said to be the first ceremony of its kind given by this family, and would not have to be repeated for a generation or more. The immediate cause was the occurrence of numerous illnesses and deaths. When members independently consulted their *hungans* to discover the reason for these misfortunes, they were informed that the family *loa* demanded such a rite. Finally one priest, more powerful than the others, became possessed and described in great detail the type of ceremony that was desired: of how many days' duration, the number and kind of sacrifices, what gods were to be called, which troublesome ones must be "sent away" or "restrained," and those of the friendly *loa* who were to be fed.

The entire ritual was conducted out of doors, and at about half past four in the afternoon of Thursday, 5 July, 1934, when first seen, the *action de grâce* had already begun. It was being chanted by the *prêt' savanne*, a bespectacled, middle-aged man, who read from an old prayerbook, while the *hungan* sat quietly by. The officiant was standing in a cleared space with his back toward a grove of trees, facing the "altar." Opposite was a grassy slope, which was separated from this grove by a brook where the Malt' Source lives who watches over the habitation of the family. A white banner hung high in one of the trees a little behind the altar.

This altar, called the *trône*, was a table covered with a white cloth, spread over a frame to form a canopy sheltering its sides and back. A black cloth was beneath the white covering. Under the table a wooden bowl — a *gamelle* — contained water in which sacred leaves had been steeped; near it was a

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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845 ample, long before ordinary folk.[4] If promised offerings in the
837 event of an ample harvest, their aid in bringing about this
782 desired end is even more fruitful than that of the *loa* or the
769 dead, who are therefore appealed to only indirectly.

Twins, however, are capricious beings, ready to do harm if they are not humored. Consequently, twins must be given anything they ask for, and it is especially important to provide them with the clothes they covet, when giving a *mangé marassa*. If their father fails to provide these new clothes, they
● [153] will *kenbé* (seize) him, and he may at once have an attack of fever or a bad toothache or earache; or, more likely still, he will be seriously constipated, since this is the punishment particularly favored by the *marassa*, just as the *loa* most frequently send dysentery, and the dead cause headaches. If lack
845 of resources makes it impossible to provide what they demand,
837 a painstaking explanation must be given them or they will
828 drive a person mad in the manner recounted in the following *marassa* myth:

> There were once twins, one good and one evil. They were working a field with another brother, but the evil one refused to help. The other two, therefore, said they would not give him any food. Because of this the evil twin drove the third brother insane. After they had long prayed that he reconsider, he finally agreed to restore sanity to his brother, but insisted on inflicting deafness as a punishment, so that this brother was deaf until he died.

845 At the birth of twins, special "twin plates" are provided
778 when their birth is announced to the *loa* — either before or
769 after their Church baptism — where offerings to the spirits of twins are placed. Usually paired, the plates may be three in number, in which case the third is for the *dosu*, the child born after twins, who is believed to be even more powerful than twins themselves and is thus an important figure in the cult.

2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1968) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Another factor that may explain some of the confusion over which rites a loa is attached to is the concept of the *escorte*, a kind of army or association of loa which may include deities of different nations. In discussing the loa Wanilé, for example, one Haitian noted:

"Wanilé is neither Rada nor Dahomé, but Pétro. She is an escorte, and she walks with Dahomé. In the escorte, Dahomé and Pétro walk together. A big loa—a loa with a big name—has many other loa who walk with him. In an escorte there are twenty-one in all. The escorte has a chief, and under the chief there are soldiers—that is, smaller loa who must do what the chief says.

"For example, a man goes to a houngan and gets him to send a strong loa against you to hurt you in some way—to make you sick or lose your crop. Your own loa may be a strong one, but the houngan has sent a still stronger one against you, and so your own loa can't really protect you. So he will go away and send in his place one of his escorte. This smaller loa is not as strong perhaps as the one he is replacing, but he is stronger in that the houngan did not calculate on him. He has certain abilities which he can use to help you. And it isn't suspected that he is your protector. So in this way he is in a better position than your own loa.

"The smaller loa go together in an escorte. Many people may have a certain loa, and he is busy all the time. If someone needs him and he can't go, he will send one of his escorte, the next one below him.

"If you are made sick by a loa, there are so many in his escorte you don't know which one made you sick, so you can't do anything about it. It is difficult sometimes to identify the loa that is hurting you. You really have to dig to find out who he is. You have to give a *mangé*. There is a big ceremony, and you have to be bought back from the loa. But some loa who are persecuting you won't sell you back. They won't go away. Rather than leave you alone they would see you die. Perhaps the person who sent this loa against you sent him to kill. If your own loa can't protect you he will send one of his escorte to do it. *Gainyain connain passé connain* [There is knowledge that surpasses knowledge]. *Si fer pas coupé fer, machoquette pas gainyain travaille* [If iron didn't cut iron, the blacksmith would have no work to do]."

This concept of the escorte, some of whose members may be Rada and some Pétro, helps to explain why certain deities are identified with rites of different "nations." For the Haitian himself it provides a way of accounting for "families" that have grown beyond the ritual number seven. Yet there are some Haitians who declare that every member of an escorte is simply a different manifestation of a single deity.

The loa, like the rites, vary somewhat according to region and to the

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1953) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

beyond the obvious fear of contagion. In his study of Dahomey, Herskovits notes:

> . . . Small-pox is believed to be sent as a punishment for grave offenses in the eyes of these [the Sagbata] deities, and it is taken to indicate that either the dead person himself or a member of his family has committed some heinous crime such as the practice of black magic. A person who dies of small-pox may only be buried after permission has been given by the chief priest of the Earth cult.[20]

Thus, in Haiti, though the connections with the past are clouded, it is clear that victims of lightning and smallpox are treated as a special class of criminals or malefactors.

Ordinary malefactors such as malevolent criminals and murderers—until recent years, at least—were not buried in the common graveyard. They, too, were segregated at the periphery of the cemetery or buried at the edge of a trail or road where the traffic would not permit them to rest and where their graves would be under constant surveillance. The roadside grave sometimes was also the fate of a person killed by lightning.

That these special burials are related to the Dahomean and Yoruban concepts of retribution for crimes against the deities is supported by the similarity of treatment accorded victims of lightning and disease and common criminals. In Haiti, Herskovits observes: "Those who die of smallpox or leprosy, suicides, or persons shot as a punishment for crime are not buried in the communal cemetery, but in special sections of the graveyard," the suicides and criminals being set apart from the others.[21]

Graves found near the seashore, lake shores, or riverbanks frequently are declared to belong to persons who died of drowning.

Approximately nine days after a person's death, the "last prayers" are said, and the soul of the deceased is presumed to have departed from the house. Once more, under the tonnelle outside there are games, storytelling, and singing. On this night, however, there is also drumming and dancing of a special kind. Usually it is the Juba, or Martinique, dance, which is believed to be specially enjoyed by the dead, and it is the older people, rather than the young, who participate. These festivities are believed to give cheer to the deceased and to "encourage" him on his way. On the next night comes the mangé mort, the feast for the family dead, a ritual which continues periodically through the years.

Sometimes in Haiti you may come upon an old tomb or grave before which a dish of specially prepared food has been set. This is part of the mangé mort ritual.

A man may make provision in advance of his death for the rites which follow his burial. He may designate special animals to be killed, leave

[20] [Ibid., pp. 397–398. Cf. P 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

[21] [Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, P. 214. Cf. P. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

Courlander B-6 (1907-1965) 1968 GV2 Haiti 9V3

to "eat" people; that is, to destroy them. To do this he employs such means as disease, insanity, and destruction of crops. If a man serves Pinga Maza well, the loa protects him in return; but for those who anger him, Pinga is a menacing and vengeful creature. People often say, "Pinga, c'est djab" (Pinga is a devil).

The Pinga hounfor in Port-au-Prince is called the *Société de la Belle Jeune Fleur*. Its peristyle is simple and is hardly distinguishable from those of other small hounfors. Around the base of the center pole is a three-foot-high wall of masonry, decorated with simple cult symbols. The outer room of the hounfor proper also resembles many another. The familiar pot têtes containing loa stand on a wooden altar, and there are Catholic lithographs on the walls. But the inner room belongs exclusively to Pinga Maza. Here are all the accoutrements and objects sacred to the deity. Everything is red. Pinga's clothing and kerchiefs are red. On the walls are painted esoteric designs—hands, skulls, and crosses—all in red. The bottles, magic bundles, and govis on the altar are decorated with red cloth, ribbons, or paint. In the middle of the earthen floor is embedded a heavy wooden cross. On each end of the crossbeam hangs a large calabash resembling a bulbous hand. And on top of the upright is affixed a human skull. The total impression of this hounfor is that of a bizarre aberration, calculated to intimidate and terrify. The houngan himself is relatively young, literate, and city wise. His personality is smooth and sharp, and he lacks the air of sincerity and easy simplicity which most often characterizes the houngan of the mountains.

In this inner room, before the skull and the cross, there took place a small service for a client, to determine what kind of magic was needed to fend off malevolent actions of an enemy. On the day of the divining session, there hung from the rafters of the tonnelle a long rope, which extended into a deep hole in the earth near the door. Hanging on the rope, down inside the hole, were two gray dolls tightly bound together. Hanging still farther down were a knife, a fork, and other, unidentifiable objects. This cluster of magic paraphernalia was an *expédition* at work; it was an elaborate poulo, which was working against an enemy who lived far away.

Before entering the hounfor, the houngan took a long rope whip from the wall and cracked it seven times before the door. This process, known as *frete cache*, was to "wake up" the loa within. The houngan then entered, followed by the client who was seeking help. They paused briefly in the outer room, where the houngan took up his asson and bell and made a small vèvè on the ground. He spoke briefly in *langage* and then passed on through the door to the inner room. There the

2: Courlander B-5 (1927-1968) 1960 HV3 Haiti HV3

does not marry his horse. People marry people. Loa marry loa. A man may have a compact with a loa. That is not a marriage. Some of the things that are going on down there in the Plain are not right. They are not the old way. In the old days we did things differently. We did not always run to the houngan. The grand famille knew how to talk to the loa. Up here we don't do things the way they do them down below in the city. People marry people. Loa marry loa."

Nevertheless, the practice in the neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and the Cul-de-Sac Plain is for mystic marriages to take place when deemed useful, essential, or unavoidable. Foremost among the loa involved in these rites is Èzilie Wèdo, the "pure" one, the deity of love, sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Other loa known to have taken part in mystic marriages are Damballa, Ogoun, Ayida, Agwé, Gédé Nimbo or one of his brothers, Ossain Zaka, and Général Clermeil. All these loa—significantly, I think—have clearly defined personalities; much is known about their character and behavior, their likes and dislikes.

A man married to Èzilie has special obligations to her for the duration of his life. On certain days (especially Thursday, which is sacred to this deity), the mortal "husband" may not have sexual intercourse, even though he has a human wife.

Circumstances leading to a mystic marriage vary widely, but in each case it is a cult priest who determines whether the rites should be held. Perhaps a person has been afflicted with a series of illnesses or misfortunes. He goes to his houngan, who begins a series of communications with the client's loa or with his own. Sometimes many loa are consulted before the desired information is available. Eventually it is determined that a certain deity, for reasons which may or may not be clear, wishes to have nuptial ties with the client. The illnesses or misfortunes that have been sent are a means of informing or warning the person concerned.

Sometimes the houngan relies on well-established divining methods to ascertain the cause of the difficulties. He may employ the *grandò* (a shell that slides on a string), ashes, or small shells that are thrown on the ground. Or he may rely on possession by a loa to provide the information.

If it is found that a loa is demanding marriage, arrangements are then made. The rites that follow may take place in a hounfor or at the house of the human bride or groom. Both a prêt' savane and a houngan officiate.

The person directly involved, like the loa, usually has something to gain from a mystic marriage. For one thing, he can reasonably expect

2: Courlander 8-5 (1937-1962) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

special future help and consideration from the loa (including the cessation of the illnesses or other misfortunes that have led to the marriage). A man (or woman) united with a loa in "matrimony" is "stronger" (*plus fort*) in his relationship to his environment and to other people. For this reason, the initiative for a mystic marriage does not always come from a loa. An ambitious person may seek such a marriage to strengthen his hand, to provide protection against other deities or human enemies, or to gain wealth or position. One observer, Odette Mennesson Rigaud, expresses the opinion that in such instances the marriage "is no longer a religious union of mystic love, but a magic pact."[10] The implicit element of "pact" is so evident in all mystic marriages, even when the initiative comes from the loa, that the distinction is not easily appreciated. However, persons suspected of "pushing" for a marriage with a loa are regarded as presumptuous or reckless, and often they are believed to have hidden motives. It is felt by many that the benefits of such a union can be only temporary and that catastrophe will ultimately follow.

A human party to marriage with a loa is deeply committed. He is subject to jealousy and anger on the part of his mystic mate. His behavior in the *hounfor* as in his daily life must be beyond the loa's reproach. He must avoid possession by other loa. And he must fulfill endless obligations. Sometimes the prospect of such binding ties is more than a man (or woman) is ready to face, and through the intercession of a strong houngan the loa may be induced to withdraw his demand for marriage. In that event, a special service is held, in the course of which the person buys his freedom with promises of special gifts and feasts for the deity.

One young man I knew was caught in a special dilemma—the houngan and the loa on one side, the Protestant Church on the other. The man, named Maurice, came from the mountains near Léogane. He was married but had no children. His wife's family, still living in Léogane, was Protestant. Maurice himself was a follower of Vodoun, and nominally a Catholic. When his wife was afflicted with a long series of headaches and earaches, Maurice consulted a houngan of Port-au-Prince. The houngan said that the loa Ayida Wèdo was demanding marriage with Maurice, and that the wife's illnesses were an indication of jealousy.

At the same time, the wife's parents came from Léogane and insisted that the girl's illnesses were brought about by God because Maurice was a follower of Vodoun. They demanded that he sever all his connections with Vodoun and become a Protestant.

After considerable anxiety, Maurice "purged" himself of Vodoun and

[10] [Odette Mennesson Rigaud, "Notes on Two Marriages with Voudoun Loa," in Appendix A of Deren, Divine Horsemen, P. 264. Cf. P. 351, category 116. -- Analyst]

B: Coulanges 9-6 (1937-1964) 1980 SV2 Habi SV3

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joined the Protestant Church. Subsequently his wife's illnesses subsided somewhat, but she never bore children. Maurice suspected that the latter misfortune was the result of his spurning his mystic suitor.

588 (793) The actual ceremonies by which a mystic marriage is performed carry over many of the customs and trappings of ordinary mortal marriages. The prêt' savane reads prayers and officiates until the two parties are deemed wed. The loa is represented by a "stand-in," usually a person possessed by the loa and dressed in appropriate garb. Gold wedding rings are placed upon the fingers of the couple. There are wedding cakes and wedding contracts. Nothing appropriate to an ordinary wedding is omitted.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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the struggle for independence, threw themselves against the formidable weapons of the whites. Whenever in spite of the drogue a man was wounded, there was always the explanation of other potent magic, never a surrender of the belief in drogues. Tradition has it that Christophe wore a drogue giving him immunity against all but silver bullets, and that he kept a silver bullet for suicide in case the need should arise—as it did. Drogues were worn by the caco guerrillas, active from 1919 to 1922, who harassed the Marines during the Occupation of the country.

Such forms of magic are found among practically every known folk. There are traces of charms in the folklore of most "civilized" people, as well as in actual, if secret, use by many apparent sophisticates.

The next commonest application of magic has to do with disease. Haiti is a poor and prevailingly illiterate country in which there are not enough trained medical doctors to serve adequately even the small population of the towns. People who live in the secluded valleys and on the mountainsides receive practically no medical attention. The disease rate if accurate figures could be obtained would certainly be shockingly high, with hookworm and malaria all but universal, and yaws, elephantiasis, and tuberculosis common. In the case of disease and its treatment, it is fair to say that the Haitian peasant is typically primitive.

Sickness is thought to be caused either as a punishment or a warning by one of the loa, or by evil magic wrought by one's enemies. When a man falls ill, therefore, he sends for the specialist, whether houngan, bocor, or caplata, to discover the responsible loa; next, he must learn whether the loa is angry with him, and if so, for what reason; if it is found that the loa is acting through magical compulsion of an enemy, the treatment of the disease will be different from the case of a loa acting without human compulsion. An angry spirit can be appeased by proper sacrifices; a spirit acting as an agent of evil magic must be fought by another spirit, compelled by the countermagic of the patient's specialist. Sometimes the countermagic is simple exorcism by spells and incantations. At other times it is highly involved and dangerous, requiring exotic plants, continuous attention, even illegal practices such as mutilating a corpse. Casual observation might fail to detect the magical element in some of the operations, for they resemble merely the brews or applications of old wives' tales.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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So it had been with the subject peoples of the island ever since its discovery. The Spaniards introduced a wide variety of European diseases to Española (an epidemic of smallpox in 1500 was estimated to have killed 200,000 Indians in the island) which did not disappear as the Indians gave way to Negroes. Three centuries of the slave trade brought blacks from many parts of Africa, and with them most of the deadliest plagues of that continent. During the flourishing days of French control over Saint-Domingue, Negro slaves were afflicted by a wide variety of diseases, the commonest being yaws, tetanus, intestinal worms, malaria, leprosy, smallpox, and scrofula, although others were certainly not absent. Only to yellow fever, probably brought with them from Africa, did the blacks seem to develop a certain immunity. Most plantations had a doctor in attendance, but medical skill during the eighteenth century was not advanced enough to cope successfully with scourges whose cause was then unknown.

After freedom there were fewer doctors than ever, less sanitation, and a worse diet. When a person was ill, his one alternative to suffering the disease to take its course was to consult the Vodun priest, for the commonly accepted explanation of disease was a spiritual one. If God (that is, the Christian God) had sent the illness, nothing could be done except to bear it, for God's will was unalterable; if it were the result of magic worked by some enemy, the identity of that enemy and the magical means used must be ferreted out so that countermagic might be employed. Vodun practitioners were, indeed, quite as important in their rôle of healing as in performing strictly religious rites. In the course of their efforts to cure disease they often stumbled upon homely but effective cures; no doubt also the mental effect of the patient's faith sometimes helped him to recover, even when the medicines administered had no specific value.

The "triple threat" to Haitian health is the morbid group: malaria, hookworm, and yaws. The first two are familiar enough in parts of the United States, and require only short comment. For centuries malaria has sapped the vitality of people in southern lands, giving them a reputation for indolence which is not wholly deserved. Haitian peasants were during the entire nineteenth century accused of laziness; when a strapping man lay all day in the shade of a tree, it was logical enough for a white visitor to suppose that he was willfully loafing. The critics might have been more temperate if they had known what it was to be perpetually full of malaria, with a body